Module 1: Overview & Preparation / Research

You have submitted your application letter, and fortunately, you are invited for an interview. What you have been waiting for has finally landed. The hiring manager of your dream company or organization has invited you to come over for a conversation. You are excited and pumped, but suddenly, you are getting cold feet. The thought of having such an essential life-changing conversation is getting you freaked out and panicked.

One thing that is crystal clear is that panic will do you no good. So, instead of letting your emotions take the better part of you, you should relax and start making preparations for the interview. Start preparing to be confident, poised, and compelling when you meet your prospective employer.

However, for some, the problem is less about panic and more about how to make necessary and relevant preparations. Meaning many people just don't know how to prepare for interviews. Although interviews vary and different companies have various requirements and specifications, some basic and essential things must be clearly understood and put in place before you set out for any interview. Well, all that is in the past now, as we will consider some basic things to help you prepare better for any interview and also walk you through every step of the interview process.

Carefully Examine the Job Description

After getting the interview invite, the most important thing is to think about the potential role and what you really want from it. You do this by going through the job description. A job description tells you the qualifications, qualities, and background the employer is looking for in an ideal candidate. This will help you think deeply and come up with thoughtful answers to some of the most common interview questions. In fact, you will probably also come up with thoughtful questions to ask the interviewer.

The greatest disservice you can do yourself is to go for an interview without carefully going over the role you are being interviewed for and get caught by seemingly tough questions. You don't

want to start stuttering and making a mess of yourself in the presence of your prospective employer. Hence, ensure you carefully review the job description and align yourself with the essential details your prospective employer is looking for to make you stand out.

Module 2: Body Language

Actions, they say, speak louder than voice. Also, experts believe that face-to-face conversation is 35% verbal and 65% nonverbal. Apparently, your body language is very important in an interview. Your posture, body movements, and facial expressions convey more about you than what you say. Hence, be deliberate about your body language.

The following tips will help you maintain good body language for any job interview.

- **Be Deliberate With Your Body Posture**

Never slouch during an interview, whether it's a virtual or physical interview. It shows a lack of confidence and respect for your interviewers. Ensure you avoid it. Instead, sit at the edge of your chair, and lean forward to show that you are genuinely interested in what they are saying.

For a virtual interview, set the camera to show you from the waist up. This way, your interviewers can clearly see your facial expressions and gestures, which will help create a meaningful connection with them.

- **Don't Fidget**

Fidgeting is not only distracting; some interviewers find it annoying. You can be dismissed if it gets too much. Though fiddling with your hands, twirling your hair, or bobbing your leg, even if your leg isn't visible on camera, the rest of your body will start to move and might distract the interviewer.

Take a deep breath, and speak as calmly as you can if you are anxious. Avoid rubbing your face, neck or head, as it makes you seem uninterested or bored to the interviewer. Finally, don't do anything you wouldn't do in a face-to-face interview, such as sneaking peeks.

- **Maintain Eye Contact**

Don't get to an interview; start looking around and avoiding eye contact. It shows a lack of self-confidence; sometimes, that might just be what the interviewer is interested in; how confident you are. Make a conscious effort to maintain eye contact, and if it's a virtual interview,

look directly into the camera. However, be considerable and careful with it, so it doesn't look like you are staring.

Make it appropriate, especially when the interviewer is addressing you. It shows good manners and interest in what the interviewer is saying. That's a likeable and appealing thing to your prospective employer.

- **Smile When Necessary**

Smiling is an excellent way to let off steam and be less nervous. Usually, you should smile at the beginning and the end of an interview. Don't smile the whole time; it makes you seem less competent and unserious. Also, learn to read the room. Everything we discuss is a guide; circumstances may change and require something else. Read the room, and figure out when you should smile and not.

Moreover, smiling too much in some fields, such as managing, data entry, reporting, etc., may be detrimental. And if you are being interviewed for social positions like teaching, sales, etc., smiling can be advantageous.

- **Practice Active Listening**

If you are going to be successful at interviews, it is imperative you practice active listening—whether in-person or virtually. Employers look for different things in candidates, and you don't know what skill or trait appeals to your prospective employer the most; it's just ideal you be at your best during that time of interview.

Listen attentively to your interviewer and pay even closer attention to the tone of their voice, facial expression, and body language. Don't get drifted away. Nod, lean forward and maintain eye contact when necessary. These are nonverbal cues to show you are listening and understanding them. Verbal cues, such as "I know," and "I understand", show you are present and interested.

Also, when you listen actively, you ask relevant and important questions for clarification. You only have a few seconds to make an impression; make it count.

Module 3: Reference Management

A very important aspect of an interview process is reference checking. This aspect helps the hiring manager gets a substantial perspective of candidates. Also, that's an excellent way to make a lasting impression on your potential employer. Hence, you need to know when your employers contact references and who to use as references. Let's get to it!

When employers call references.

Usually, employers reach out to references towards the end of the hiring process. This time, they have narrowed it to just a few candidates, using these references to decide who is suitable for the job.

The hiring manager can ask for references during the interview process. Hence, it is appropriate to have a reference list prepared when you start looking for a job. It shows you are ready and eager to get the job.

Who to use as a reference

In simple terms, a reference is someone willing to vouch for a candidate's performance and competence. Although a reference can be anyone, some options are better preferred. A possible list of references can include the following:

- Previous managers or supervisors
- Professors
- Coworkers
- Teachers
- Supervisors at volunteer organizations
- Athletic coaches
- Family friends or long-time friends.

Sometimes, hiring managers are specific about who they want as a reference; sometimes, they are not. So, it's okay to have a list of references; however, you should ask the hiring manager about the type of reference they want.

Tips for Choosing The Best Reference

- **Choose professional over personal.**

If you must choose between personal and professional references, always choose the professional. Choose a past employer over a family member. A professional reference is always a better option.

- **Choose relevant references.**

If you have a few reference options, go for the ones most relevant to the job you are applying for. Relevant references will help your interviewer understand how well you can perform. A reference from a previous manager in the same field as the job you are applying for is better than one from a different industry.

- **Always get your reference approval.**

Before submitting anyone's name for reference, even your family members, always get their approval. This is to get them prepared ahead.

- **Give details to references.**

Be sure you give details of the job you are applying for to the reference. Start by sending them your updated resume to help them know more about your career. Also, take time to explain to them what the job is all about. Tell them about the skills your potential is looking for.

- **Thank the references**

Always thank your references for their help. You should do this whether you get the job or not. Appreciate them for their time and effort—through emails, phone calls, etc., so they can be available to help in the future.

Module 4: Common Interview Questions

Everyone knows that interviews are all about questions. The interviewer asks you questions on different subjects relating to the role you are applying for, and how best and convincing you are in answering these questions will determine if you will get the job. More importantly, some interviewers are more interested in the candidates and what they can offer. Hence, your best chance at answering these questions is by preparing for them.

Let's consider a couple of common job interview questions to start preparing for

A. Why Did You Leave Your Last Job?

This is a very common question in interviews, and the answers depend on the kind of job you do. And if you are still at your present place of work, you may be asked why you are considering a change. The key to answering this question is focusing on positivity and your willingness to explore opportunities for change, growth, and maybe new challenges. The wrongest thing to say is to criticize your former employee. Keep it positive and optimistic.

B. Tell Me About Yourself.

There are almost no interviews where this question is not asked. In fact, you can be sure this is the first question you will be asked. Usually, you should answer this question in 60 seconds. Hence, you have to be precise and detailed. Now, to answer these questions brilliantly, you should keep the following in mind:

- **Current Role Headline**

You could say:

"I am a Web developer at X company, where I've been developing websites for the past X years", or

"I am a business analyst at company X, where I've helped with analyzing data and providing insightful solutions that drive sales and increase productivity."

- **Background/Education**

Just a line or two about your background, in this context, in programming or business analysis.

Here is an example of what to say:

“My background is in JavaScript, HTML, CSS, PHP. I completed my bachelor's degree at X and spent summers freelancing.”

Or

“My background is in data analysis, with a degree from University XY. I did an internship at Company Z.”

- **Career Summary**

Briefly describe your most significant achievements. Remember, your interviewer has your resume. So it will be nice if you don’t bore them with everything on your resume. Keep it precise and relevant to the job description.

- **Current Role Details**

Also, describe what you are currently working on if you are learning a new programming language, a new skill, taking a new course, or doing anything to expand your career. Again, ensure it is related to the role you are being interviewed for.

- **Wrap Up**

Wrap it up with something you are looking forward to. Tell them what excites you about working for the company you are interviewing for. Speak clearly, and speak with confidence.

All of this must be tailored to the job description. This is why you should fully understand the job description. Also, the following must be in line with the job description:

- Relevant skills.
- Relevant experience.
- Significant achievements.
- How you're a good fit.

C. Where Do You See Yourself in Five Years?

This is a very tricky question and must be thoughtfully answered. Here are a couple of things your potential employer wants to know with that question:

- They want to know if you will leave your new position anytime soon.
- They want to know if your long-term plans and goals align with the company.

Hence, to answer this question, take some time to think about your career goals and communicate them to show how they fit into the role you are applying for. Let the interviewer know you are not just there for the paycheck.

Example: *"I want to complete X qualifications relevant to my position within the next five years." Before this interview, I took the time to research your website. I saw that you provide options for your staff to expand their education, including obtaining certifications to advance their careers. I genuinely feel that I can follow my professional aspirations and eventually advance into a management position within your company over the coming several years using the resources that your company offers its employees."*

D. What are Your Strengths and Weaknesses?

This is another common question that comes up during an interview session. Again, the key to answering this question lies in the job description.

Firstly, your strengths and weaknesses should reflect relevant requirements to the role in question. Look through the description, highlight relevant skills and discuss how you will improve on the skills you lack.

Keep in mind these two things:

- Your strength should be something that can be supported through experience.
- Your weaknesses should be supported with a clear plan to improve them.

Secondly, don't reveal too much. Honesty is important, but be careful of what you reveal. Saying things like tardiness, inability to meet deadlines, working too hard, caring too much, etc., will not work. Be honest, but don't reveal too much.

Examples of strengths include:

- Communication skills.
- People skills.
- Writing skills.
- Analytical skills.
- Honesty.
- Leadership skills.
- Patience.
- Writing skills.
- Empathy.

Examples of weaknesses include:

- Self-criticism.
- Shyness.
- Lack of knowledge of particular software.
- Public speaking.
- Taking criticism.
- Lack of experience.
- Inability to delegate.
- Lack of confidence

Strength

- I am a very honest person. Usually, when I feel that my workload is too large to take on another task, or maybe I don't understand something, I'll let my supervisor know. It helps me give my best to every task I'm assigned to.
- My leadership skills are my greatest strength. As a senior manager at company X, I successfully organized training programs for my team. I ensured everyone knew and was confident in their new role. As a result, my team and I increased the company's sales by 7%.

Weaknesses.

- I get intimidated by public speaking, and often, I struggle with presentations. To improve on this, I registered for an online course on public speaking. Also, every weekend I volunteer in my community outreach unit, where I get to address a crowd of people. This will help me become confident and structure my speech more effectively.
- While I was at company X, I mainly used Java, so I don't have much experience with Python. As a result, I am taking a weekend course on Python at the University of X.

E. How do You Deal With Conflict in The Workplace?

Finally, the last question we will explore is how to deal with conflict in the workplace. Interviewers ask questions to examine the communication skills of their prospective employees. Basically, effective communication with co-workers, supervisors, managers, etc., is a good way to prevent and escalate disagreement.

Secondly, your interviewers want to know how calm and professional you can be when resolving a conflict; your interpersonal skills. No one wants to hire a hot-tempered staff who is difficult to work with (we will talk more about behavioural skills shortly). Below is what to do:

- Briefly describe how the event occurred
- Highlight the role your role in the event

- Describe precisely the steps you take to approach the situation
- Share the result that shows how the outcome was positive.

Example:

While I was at company X, I was appointed to oversee a team tasked on building and implementing a digital marketing campaign. I had to delegate tasks to the team members and ensure compliance. One of my team members was not pleased with me being the team lead and refused to complete their task. I asked to meet them and discuss the issue.

After listening to them voice their grievances, I explained that if the project is done successfully, our supervisor may consider them to be the team lead of future responsibilities. I empathized with them and told them I understood their grievances. The issue was resolved, and they were happy to complete their task, which led to a 10% increase in sales.

Module 5: Behavioural Interview Questions

Employers are not only interested in your technical skills during an interview. Usually, the first step of any employment process is to test your technical skills. If you are a good fit, they invite you over for an interview, where they are more interested in the candidates. Not always their technical skills but also their behavioural skills or people skills.

Employers want to know how you would respond to different workplace situations. They present you with a situation and ask how you have responded to such situations and the outcome. They want a glimpse into your thought process.

What is a Behavioral Interview?

A behavioral interview is an aspect of the interview where employers evaluate candidates' behavioural responses to specific workplace situations just to examine how they perceive things. There are loads of behavioral interview questions, and the response varies from person to person. We will consider a few of the questions and how to respond.

Although you don't need to memorize answers, you should know what experiences you would share and how to describe them to the interviewer. Your answers must be precise and clear. No fluffs.

Below are the six most common behavioral interview questions:

1. **Tell me, how do you handle challenges? Could you walk me through a time you encountered and how you dealt with it?**

When asked this question, your interviewer wants to know how you will respond to a challenging situation. This is because things can go wrong regardless of how well you do your job. So, focus on a particular challenge and outline how you approached it.

Example Answer

I've had many challenges throughout my career and education. One event that comes to mind happened in my final year. Four other colleagues and I were told to work on a particular project. A few days before the project delivery deadline, the team lead got sick and had to go home. It

became challenging as we now had more work to deal with within a short period. I stepped up to lead the team. I planned and divided the task into bits and shared it with my other teammates. This plan was efficient; fortunately, we provided the best project without losing our team spirit.

2. **Tell me about the time you had to work under pressure.**

Your interviewer wants to know how well you can work under pressure. Highlight how you have dealt with pressure.

Example Answer

There was this particular task I worked on with a scheduled deadline of 60 days. 10 days into the task, my supervisor reached out and said we needed to speed it up and make it ready in 40 days. I first put other unrelated tasks on hold, planned the task again, and then reached out to a couple of colleagues for assistance.

Also, I added a few more hours to my work hours, and with that, we got the job done effectively in 36 days. I'd say I had a wonderful group of people who were willing to help, but largely, I believe the effective planning strategy and staff allocation were key to the project's success.

3. **How Do You Set Goals?**

This question is basically about how you plan objectives and set milestones for your project.

Example Answer

I believe less is more. I like to keep things less clumsy and feasible. If I have a project coming up, I plan a series of small and feasible objectives within a time frame. Then step wisely, I tick off boxes and get the job done. I do this for both work and personal goals.

Also, I'm always open to reevaluating my approach to setting goals. If one is not working, I reevaluate and devise another strategy for setting and achieving my goals.

4. **Give an example of a goal you reached and tell me how you achieved it.**

You have told the interviewer how you set goals; now, they want to know what you do to achieve them. The stepwise approach to accomplishing them.

Example Answer

The first place I worked after school was company X. It's a very popular company. Whoever wins employee of the month gets a parking space and their picture on the wall for the month; I really wanted that. So, I decided I wanted the Employee of the Month title. It was challenging, as there were other amazing colleagues I worked with, and they all wanted the title.

I made plans to be great at my job and helping to my colleagues, bosses and clients. I was virtually, almost available to help. In the third month, I won the title. I got a parking space, and my picture was on the wall for the month.

Afterwards, I won the title many times more, eventually becoming the manager very quickly. That success helped me build perseverance and a positive attitude to work and everyone.

5. **Have you ever made a mistake? How did you handle it?**

We are humans, and we all make mistakes. The interviewer is not interested in the mistake but in how you handled it. They want to know how you approached and fixed it. Outline an event that happened to detail how you fixed it.

Example Answer

I once gave a wrong membership figure to a client at my company. The member came back really angry. But before she came back, I had already gone to meet the manager and explained the mistake. He was glad I came to inform him and told me what to do. Though angry when the client returned, we apologized and offered to take care of the extra cost. The client was glad, and she left happily.

The manager thanked me for my honesty and urged me to pay attention to details. Since then, I've learned to be as accurate and precise as possible.

6. **Share an example of how you were able to motivate employees or co-workers.**

The hiring manager wants to know if you have strong motivational skills. They want to know the strategies and your ability to motivate your team members. Highlight an event for them.

Example Answer

I recall when two of my colleagues failed to deliver an assignment on time, and the project we were working on got delayed. That affected our timeline, and we had to spend extra money to get some things sorted due to the delay.

The manager got angry and lashed out at the entire team. We all took a hit. But the colleagues of mine that caused the delay felt bad and, at some point, one of them started crying. Their team spirit was already affected. I noticed they were becoming less of themselves, especially whenever the team was around.

I met with them, discussed it extensively, and was able to motivate them. The project was a huge success, and the manager commended us.

These questions are not exhaustive, as there are loads of other behavioral interview questions. More so, the answers here are not absolute. They are samples to give you an idea of how to answer questions. We've all had unique experiences. You don't have to memorize the answers. Craft your answers from your unique experience. However, the answers here will help you get started if you're stuck.

Module 6: Salary Negotiation

Salary negotiation is a major discussion during an interview. And no matter how exciting the job offer is, if the salary compensation is not fair enough, it can affect job satisfaction. In fact, you can always decline a job offer if the salary is below your pay grade. As such, it is ideal and incredibly important you understand the nuances of how to negotiate salary during an interview or after getting the job offer.

However, you don't want to come off rude or impatient. Bringing up salary discussion too early, for example, may indicate impatience and interest in the paycheck than the job. Also, quoting a desired salary figure without doing a proper market research may mean you leaving money on the table or being inconsiderate. Hence, proper market research and impeccable timing is imperative to salary negotiation. Also, you must be diplomatic and prepared to talk money with a potential employer.

The following tips will help you gets started on how to go about salary negotiation during or after an interview:

1. The best time to talk about money with your potential employer is when you are pursuing a new position, and not when you have been hired. That's the leverage you should take advantage of. Never forget that!

2. Never go for an interview without proper market research on the average salaries in your field. Also, salaries vary with locations. Factor that into your research.

3. Your level of experience and unique attributes should also be considered. Any hiring manager worth their salt knows that the more valuable and experienced a candidate is, the more their paycheck. Don't sell yourself short.

4. Set a salary range with this information. Be realistic and factual. And your number should be relevant to your state, location, industry, position, skills, and experience.

5. Practice how to talk about money with your potential employer confidently and respectfully.

6. Don't bring up the topic before the hiring manager. You may come off as being impatient and one who is more interested in money than solving the company's problems. Let the hiring manager bring up the topic.

7. Also, ensure you have formally been offered the job before you discuss salary issues. If the interviewer brings it up before, stylishly ignore it by speaking generally. Ensure you know the full details of the job before discussing or agreeing to any specific salary figure.

8. Don't discuss your salary history with the hiring team. Doing this may get you pinned down to a lower offer. If you MUST discuss your salary history, it should be after you have been offered the job and your salary figure is agreed.

9. Also, remember to ask for benefits during your salary discussion. There is more to your compensation package.

10. Incorporate a small and reasonable cushion to your proposed salary figure, so if they offer less, it's still a win for you. However, don't be greedy.

There you have our ten tips to help you negotiate your salary figure. Remember, don't be impatient and don't sell yourself cheap.

Module 7: After the Interview:Thank-You Letters and Offer Negotiation

Congratulations on your job offer! However, that is not all there is to do. It's a normal practice to write an appreciation letter when you receive a job offer. This allows you formally confirm the new position and even start your professional relationship in a good way.

In fact, if you don't get the job offer, it's wise you send an appreciation letter to thank them for the opportunity. It helps you build a great relationship with the company, and they will remember when there is an opportunity in the future.

In simple terms, a job offer thank-you letter is a to appreciate a potential employer for giving you the offer to work for their company. It's to express your gratitude for the job offer and include a formal acceptance or rejection of the offer.

What Should Be In Your Letter

The content of the letter will vary depending on whether you accept or reject the offer. Either way, the most important thing is an appreciation of the offer. If you accepted the offer, the following are key information that should be included in your letter:

- **Terms of the Offer**

Although a thank-you letter is not a legal document, it is appropriate for you to clarify the terms of your job offer, including the job title, start date, agreed on salary figure, and other relevant terms.

- **Contact Information.**

Also, include your contact details, including your email address, phone number, etc. This is important for more accessible communication if they need to pass on any information or things to bring along when starting.

- **Questions and Clarifications**

You can also include specific questions or clarifications on things that are not very clear. For instance, you may need further clarifications on benefits or the official start date.

If you are not taking the job, however, you may briefly include the reasons for your decision. However, this is not a place to negotiate a counteroffer. All you need to do is thank them for the offer, express your willingness to keep in touch and be open to future opportunities.

Steps to Writing A Thank-you Letter

Follow these steps to write an impeccable thank-you letter:

1. **Start by saying thank you**

Typically, you should start by saying thank you, which could come in the first paragraph. This is done to establish the purpose of the letter. Include the company name and the position you are offered. Appreciate them for their time and effort.

2. **Accept or decline the job offer.**

In the next paragraph, inform them if you will accept or decline the offer. If you are accepting, be sure to show enthusiasm; if you are declining, be polite and respectful. Briefly state why you declined the offer, and tell them you'd like to stay in contact for future opportunities; if you accept the offer, move on to the next step

3. **Ask questions or confirm details.**

If you need clarification on the job offer, this is where you ask. You can also request a meeting with your employer—a phone call, video call or anything to discuss further the benefits, responsibilities or policies of the job.

4. **Include your contact information.**

Include your contact information in your thank-you letter so your employer can reach you for further information regarding the job offer.

5. **Proofread and edit your letter**

When you are done writing, patiently proofread and edit the letter. You don't want to give-off the impression. Pay attention to details, including spelling and grammar, clarity, tone, etc. Keep it professional, precise and understandable. Don't try to impress with big grammar. Simple and direct.

6. **Send out the letter**

You can send out the letter by mail or email. If you are sending through email, ensure you use a professional email address and include a nice subject line. The subject line can be as simple as "acceptance letter" or "thank-you letter." Include your first and last name as well.

Interviews are peculiar and must be treated as such. The key to acing an interview is preparing for it. Take some time to come up with relevant questions and provide answers to them. This guide, however, will set you on the right path to getting the job.

Good Luck!